NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0157 FEBRUARY 11, 1976
SPLANE/MIAMI

THE ANGUILLA STORY: HISTORY IN REVERSE

INTRO:

AS A CLIMAX TO WHAT MAY BE HISTORY'S ONLY RECORDED STRUGGLE FOR A RETURN TO COLONIAL STATUS, THE TINY WEST INDIAN ISLAND OF ANGUILLA THIS WEEK ONCE AGAIN BECAME A BRITISH COLONY. WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT, HERE'S VOA CORRESPONDENT RUSSELL SPLANE IN MIAMI:

TEXT:

A NEW CONSTITUTION PUTTING THE FIFTY-FIVE SQUARE KILOMETER CARIBBEAN ISLAND AND ITS SIX THOUSAND INHABITANTS UNDER DIRECT BRITISH RULE WENT INTO EFFECT ON TUESDAY OF THIS WEEK. ANGUILLA DECLARED IT A PUBLIC HOLIDAY NAMED -- OF ALL THINGS -- "FREEDOM DAY," A TERM GENERALLY USED TO MARK THE DAY THAT AN OVERSEAS TERRITORY SHEDS ITS COLONIAL STATUS.

BUT THEY DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY ON ANGUILLA, EVER SINCE THE DAY NINE YEARS AGO WHEN THE ISLAND MADE A UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF SEPARATION FROM THE THREE-ISLAND GROUPING OF ST. KITTS-NEVIS-ANGUILLA TO WHICH IT HAD BEEN ASSIGNED. THE DECLARATION WAS TO THE POINT: THE ANGUILLANS SIMPLY PUT THE SEVENTEEN POLICEMEN STATIONED THERE BY THE ST. KITTS CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN A BOAT AND SENT THEM HOME.

ANGUILLA ASKED BRITAIN TO TAKE IT BACK. WHEN LONDON REFUSED, THE ISLAND ASKED BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED NATIONS TO ADOPT IT. WHEN THIS DIDN'T WORK, ANGUILLA DECLARED ITSELF AN INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC WITH ITS OWN FLAG AND STAMPS.

BUT THE ANGUILLAN REVOLUTION PEAKED IN NINETEEN SIXTY-NINE WHEN BRITISH PRIME MINISTER HAROLD WILSON -- HEARING REPORTS OF LAWLESSNESS ON THE ISLAND -- ORDERED IT INVADED. MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED ARMED BRITISH PARATROOPERS SWARMED ASHORE ON MARCH NINETEENTH -- NOT TO CAPTURE ANGUILLA, BUT TO FORCE IT TO RETURN TO THE ST. KITTS STATE.

ALL THAT THE PARATROOPERS FOUND WAS A RUSTY, UNUSABLE CANNON, A GREAT MANY STARTLED GOATS AND A BEMUSED POPULATION. WITHIN ONE DAY, THE PARATROOPERS WERE PLAYING CRICKET WITH THE ANGUILLANS AND HAD DISCOVERED THE ISLAND'S SPLENDID WHITE BEACHES. NEXT CAME ARMY ENGINEERS WHO PROCEEDED TO BUILD ANGUILLA'S FIRST HARBOR AND ITS FIRST PAVED ROADS. THEY BROUGHT THE ISLAND ITS FIRST ELECTRICITY AND TELEPHONES, BUILT NEW SCHOOLS AND PAVED THE AIRPORT RUNWAY.

FOR SEVEN YEARS, ANGUILLAN LEADER RONALD WEBSTER HAS KEPT UP THE PRESSURE ON BRITAIN TO RESTORE THE ISLAND'S COLONIAL STATUS BY THREATENING TO TEAR UP THE ROADS AND PULL DOWN THE SCHOOLS. LATE LAST YEAR, BRITAIN RELUCTANTLY ACQUIESCED. NEGOTIATORS FROM LONDON WENT TO THE ISLAND TO HELP DRAFT THE NEW CONSTITUTION THAT WENT INTO EFFECT THIS WEEK.

MEANWHILE, THE VICTORIOUS ANGUILLANS ARE NOW MAKING PLANS FOR NEW TOURISM COMPLEXES, AN OIL REFINERY AND A SHIP BUILDING INDUSTRY.

JS/LP